



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE CHRISTOLOGY OF A MODERN RATIONALIST

---

FRANK HUGH FOSTER  
Olivet, Mich.

---

It is the purpose of the present article to describe the Christology of a modern Christian rationalist. Any such description must be in a large degree understood as personal and individual, since no such writer has any warrant for speaking for another; and yet it may be possible to make a statement with which a considerable number would agree. It will be the effort here to avoid that which is unduly individual and to speak in as representative a manner as possible. Inasmuch as Christian rationalism begins in a protest against the historic theories of the person of Christ, it will be necessary to begin with a statement of certain negative positions.

The fundamental objection to the acceptance of the church Christology is that it is not proved. As an abstract proposition, the doctrine that God intervened in the history of the world for man's salvation, and that, in some way not further defined, God himself came into a unique union with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, may readily be admitted as a possibility by any believer in the personality of God. But when the definite doctrine of ecclesiastical Christology is presented for one's acceptance, the rationalist finds that it is wholly without proof. It depends for what authority it possesses upon the statements of writings that are of uncertain origin, of late date, and marred by an attitude toward the marvelous which of itself would be enough to invalidate their authority. Hence, while he might possibly accept this Christology as a possible opinion, or as one which he found helpful, or to which his education personally inclined him, he could not regard it as a doctrine capable of being erected into an element of a creed or of an authoritative liturgy. For himself, he declines to accept it. That is his personal attitude; and he recognizes that it may

be of little importance to others, however important to himself. But even if he should accept the Christology of the historical creeds as a private opinion, he would be none the less earnest in demanding that it should never be illegitimately used as a condition of church fellowship or as a form of subscription required of officers of the church. Such uses he regards, in the uncertainty which must attach to it, as entirely unjustifiable and absolutely unethical.

In deciding whether he should accept the church Christology for himself, the rationalist is led by the following considerations: He has formed, through his study of nature, the conception that all its events proceed according to law. He finds in the early records of the race the most abundant evidence that men originally and for the most of their history have had an entirely different conception. They have believed in constant and innumerable exceptions to the order of nature, introduced by various beings of a supernatural character, both evil and good, weak and powerful, interfering for ends the most trivial as well as the most important. He finds in early mankind unreasonable fears brought with them as they emerged from the conditions of the savage barbarism in which they originally lived, and an equal love of the astonishing and marvelous. Every age, according to this view of the world, is an age of miracle; and all miracles are equally transient in their effects and insignificant in their purpose. The religions of the world all arose in ages of miracle, and have been perpetuated under the influence of a constant belief in such interferences in the order of nature. The Christian religion is like all the rest in this particular. To none of these miracles does he give any credence, whether they be the marvelous impossibilities of Buddhistic legend, or the trivialities of mediaeval monkery, or the miracles of the New Testament, so hallowed, even to himself, by the teachings and associations of centuries of ecclesiastical history. All these stand or fall together, for there is no essential difference in the attitude of their narrators to them, and they fall with the rise of that conception of the world which has developed under the name of law. The incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ are but examples of this general category of the miraculous found in Christianity

in common with the other religions, and they fall with the rest. Miracles remain abstractly possible, as already remarked; but this concession loses all importance in the eyes of the rationalist, because it becomes so entirely improbable to him that God ever has so interfered or ever will interfere. The reign of law was wisely established and has needed no revision.

This position is, of course, entirely a dogmatic one. The prejudice in every age against dogmatic, that is, philosophical or rational, methods has been so strong that it is well to add another consideration. Not all rationalists start from a dogmatic position. Some have come to it from historical studies, unconscious of any philosophical presuppositions. Modern history is founded upon the scientific idea of law. If this idea be taken, however, merely as a guiding thread, or clue, the results of the historical investigation will be so consistent and reasonable that they will compel a subsequent, if they have not had an antecedent, consent to the principle of the invariability of law. Taken in any way which modern investigators are likely to follow out, the critical study of the New Testament history, the study of the history of the doctrine in the church, and the study of comparative religion, will all themselves suggest, and powerfully reinforce when already suggested, the conception that the whole supernatural apparatus of historical Christianity is the product of the times in which it originated, and that literally taken, as the creeds and confessions take it, it is without proof.

With the fall of these elements of the church's historical teaching, falls also the whole edifice of the traditional Christology. The whole question of the union of two natures, human and divine, in one person, Christ, disappears. The old insoluble enigmas disappear. Conjunction and union, the development of the God-consciousness of Jesus, the *kenosis*, and all the other methods of making intelligible the primary idea of two natures in one person, have lost their meaning and interest. The rationalist sees a man born into the world who receives the name of Jesus, and is subsequently called the Christ. He takes him as a man, as all others do; and seeing no reason for ascribing to him anything more than humanity, he leaves him under this plain and simple category,

and his Christology becomes, in summary, simply this: that Christ was a man.

But while, upon the formal side, his Christology is exhausted in this simple statement, its real contents will prove to be far richer. What does he think of this man, Jesus? What does he believe himself to derive from him? And what relations does he sustain to him which may be called present and real relations? The answer to such questions as these will give the real contents to the Christology, the form of which is the true and simple humanity of Jesus.

1. The answer of such questions will naturally begin with the *historicity* of Jesus. Was Jesus a historical person?

It should be premised, for the sake of clearness, that in some important respects it makes no difference to the modern thinker whether Jesus was a historical person or not. In spite of the emphasis which has been laid in certain quarters upon Christianity as a historical religion, and the importance of the study of history to its right interpretation, it may be still maintained that no system of truth which shall dominate the mind and claim authority over the conduct of man can rest upon the reality of any historical personality. Salvation cannot be something "objectively" secured by the work of a historical person, as is supposed in current views of the atonement, because it is the inner state of the soul, the condition of harmony and communion with God. Truth cannot be something which depends upon the existence of the person who first spoke it to the world, because it is truth only as it shines to the mind by its own light. If these current views were correct, then a historical personage would be necessary for the existence of the Christian religion, and Christianity would be exposed to every breath of criticism which should assail the Gospels as the original authorities for the life of Christ. Truth must be placed above such dangers as those which would arise to it under this method of conceiving it. Though Jesus should be proved never to have existed, the truth which has come down to us, and which we have received because of its own self-evidencing value, and which we have found to work out such great results in the liberation of our spirits from the thralldom of sin and the establishment of holy relations with the Heavenly

Father, would still be true, and its effects would remain unaltered. In this sense a historical Christ is unnecessary.

The original and the principal reason for doubting the historicity of Jesus is the presence in the Gospels of the mythical element. The picture presented of Jesus in the Gospels is not historical; and the step is short to the conclusion that perhaps there was no historical Jesus at all. But the presence of mythical elements in the story of the life of a man does not disprove his historicity. Charlemagne was surrounded with this element in a biography written of him not long after his death. Martin of Tours and Bernard of Clairvaux were wonder-workers. Myths surround Washington, Lincoln, and even Roosevelt. But we nevertheless believe in the historical reality of all those persons.

Recent discussions as to the historicity of Jesus have been fully reviewed in the January and April numbers of this *Journal*. They leave the following impressions upon the mind: First, that the unanimity of the tradition that there was an epoch-making teacher in Palestine called Jesus remains unexplained upon any hypothesis presented as a substitute for the simplest and most natural explanation, that there was such a teacher. Second, that the supposition that there was a pre-Christian, Jewish-heathen Jesus god and cult, is unsustained by what facts we have and is altogether incredible. Third, that the special importance attached in the early Christian history to the person of Christ finds its most natural explanation in the reality of that person. If Christianity started in an idea, the transfer from an idea to a person, and to an "objective" system of salvation, is difficult to account for; whereas, if the start was made with a person, it is easy to explain the idealization of that person and his history, and the rise of myths, since the same process is going on around us even at this late and intellectual day. Fourth, that, in particular, the testimony of the Apostle Paul to the historicity of Jesus is too clear to admit of rejection. True, the "four undisputed epistles" of Paul are no longer undisputed, but they have not been disputed successfully. Paul's testimony, of which they are full, is the more credible because he makes so little of the life of Jesus in his writings or his theology. Nor does he seem to have any personal interest in miracles. But he who directly after the death

of Jesus came in conflict with the new Christian community had every opportunity to know whether Jesus was a historical personage or not, and he believed in his natural birth,<sup>1</sup> his human life, and his violent death upon the cross. Up to the present time there is no sufficient reason for rejecting Paul as a witness to the historicity of Jesus, and hence no sufficient reason for surrendering belief in his personal reality and the genuineness of his human career.

2. But when we come to the *construction of his personality* we find this involved in difficulties. Of no single historical detail can we be absolutely sure, unless it be his death by crucifixion. There were too many humiliations connected with that to admit of its invention. Two different places contend for the honor of his birth. Did he deliver at one time and place the Sermon on the Mount? Did he regard himself as the Messiah? Did he place the emphasis upon belief "in me" which is asserted in the Fourth Gospel? In regard to these details men will always differ, and of them all it may be said that it is of little consequence what decision is reached. Definite knowledge of the life of Jesus may be absolutely wanting, but there is a general impression which may be arrived at, which is of value. From Jesus have gone forth sweet and holy influences which have made, under the experience of God's people throughout the ages, and often by their development and addition, a body of Christian conceptions, thoughts, ideals, aspirations, teachings, consolations, and hopes. In a sense they are all Christ's. But whether any of them is of importance to us individually will depend upon its evidence to us and its application to our condition. That is light which shines. Its absolute historicity in connection with the personality of Jesus Christ is of little comparative importance.

And yet a picture of Jesus is attainable by us which is one of wondrous sweetness and attractiveness, the sweetest and most attractive in the world. It is that of a lowly teacher, of the common people in origin and hence delivered from that pride of wealth and

<sup>1</sup> Should not Gal. 4:4, which is sometimes quoted in favor of the virgin birth, be quoted against it? Paul is endeavoring in this passage to emphasize Christ's full identification with humanity. Hence "born of a woman" means born just as all other men are. The argument would be weakened if there were anything exceptional in the birth of Jesus; therefore Paul must have intended us to understand that there was nothing exceptional.

birth which seems effectually to close the channels of human sympathy with most men who have it, simple in his demands and entirely free from the pursuit of worldly success, content with the humblest provision for his wants if he could only perform his mission in the world. This was that of a teacher. First, he was a good man in his own inner life, united with God in the most intimate bonds of personal communion, bent upon the life of holy love for his own part and eager to help introduce his fellow-men into the same holy service. He began his ministry by works of kindness, healing the sick and relieving every form of misery which it was possible for him to relieve. He sought the individual religious good of every soul he met and proclaimed the way of salvation through repentance and forgiveness. Hence he encountered the increasing opposition of the officials of an external and organized church. He gathered about him a group of disciples to whom he taught the fatherhood of God, explaining the nature of righteousness and guiding them in the paths of right living. Thus public relations and personal morals came into the scope of his teaching. He preached to great multitudes everywhere, even under circumstances of great personal danger to himself. He practiced and taught the life of prayer. At last the opposition to him grew so great that he must either abandon his work and retire to obscurity or suffer the extremest enmity of the Jewish leaders, which in such a case could scarcely fail to be fatal. It was through perseverance in his work that he met his death. More personal traits are not altogether lacking to this picture, though they may be less certain historically. His beautiful face, his winning manner, his compelling persuasiveness, his in-offensiveness and his personal self-effacement, his interest in his friends, his capacity of scorn and anger (but not for himself), his dialectic skill, his personal aloofness from sin combined with his charity for the sinner, his unwearied pursuit of his daily labors, his sadness over the world, his consolation in the presence of God—these things appear in the watermarks of the history, and are scarcely to be neglected.

3. The *sinlessness* of Jesus meets with a similar solution. Of course, if we hold the old view of original sin, we shall need the old view of the miraculous birth (and then the immaculate conception of



the Virgin herself) to maintain Jesus' sinlessness. If men are born into the world guilty and condemned to eternal punishment, Jesus, as sharing in our humanity, must be a sinner. Not more favorable to his sinlessness is the view which regards every deficiency as sin. But deficiency and imperfection may represent a stage in the evolution of humanity and thus constitute a perfection to the clarified thinking of our own age. The true question in respect to Jesus will be whether he had a pure heart, fixed upon God as the supreme object of his affections, whether he obeyed his own law of love, both toward God and man, and whether he maintained this characteristic perpetually in his daily life and grew thereby. The answer to this question may well be, Yes.

We could not maintain this position upon an uncritical view of the gospel narratives. The disrespect which Jesus showed to his mother at Cana and elsewhere, the petulant and unreasonable cursing of the fig tree, the destruction of the property of the swineherds of Gadara, would each be inconsistent with Jesus' sinlessness, were we obliged to accept their truth. Fortunately they are all unhistorical, because essentially associated with unreal miracles. There may be other similar elements, such as the somewhat defiant claim of sinlessness in the Fourth Gospel. All these we may simply sweep aside; and if the result is not a sinlessness upon which dogmatic positions (such as his fitness for bearing the sins of others) could be built, we need not relinquish our persuasion for that, because we do not intend to build anything upon it except the comfort which the thought may reasonably give us.

For the benefit which the conception of the sinlessness of Jesus confers on us is that of a realized ideal. An ideal of sinlessness would not be without its value, considered as a standard and a goal toward which we could direct our efforts. But a realized ideal has the further element of encouragement. To believe that a man has once attained sinlessness is of great comfort in the actual struggle of life. We can believe in the prevalence of holy purpose in the lives of many men. It is our hope for the increasing righteousness of the world. But we do not find this purpose uninterrupted, as it should be, in the men with whom we have to do in real life, or in our own personal experience. It was uninterrupted

once! It may have been often again! It shall be in me! Such is the argument of faith and hope; and the result is an enlargement of actual attainment.

But, of course, when the sinlessness of Jesus is not merely a pious opinion, but a conviction to be used as an element of maintaining the actual conflict with sin, its potency will depend upon the degree of certainty with which we are able to embrace it. Now, whatever has to be abated from the gospel picture of the character of Jesus here and there, it remains, after all that a reasonable criticism can do, that there is a picture of an ideal man. It still is the loftiest ideal which has yet been produced in literature. If we had necessarily to believe that he taught the doctrine of "the other cheek" as it stands in Matthew, some might belittle his strength and virility on that account. But the general picture, minor details here and there being remitted to further discussion, is lofty indeed, so much so that it still remains our unsurpassed ideal. In that famous passage in which John Stuart Mill defended the historicity of Jesus, he said: "Religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life." And hence the picture of Christ here given carries with it a strong proof of its reality. It is not necessary to go to professed Christian apologists for the old argument, that it was impossible for those who wrote the Gospels to invent such an ideal, and that its existence is proof of its origin in a real personality. Mill has himself presented the same argument. "Who, among his disciples," he says, "or among their proselytes, was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee: as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort: still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that the good which was in them was all derived, as they always professed that it was derived, from the higher source."<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the ideal of Christ is a self-evidencing one.

<sup>2</sup> See *Three Essays upon Religion* (Am. ed.), 253 ff.

4. We also view his *acquaintance with God* as complete—that is, so far as human beings can either have, or estimate, such an acquaintance. He himself, according to the Fourth Gospel, gave the profoundest definition of eternal life which has ever appeared, when he styled it “acquaintance with God” (John 17:3). He spoke also of his union with the Father as a “oneness” with him (John 10:30; 17:21), which was a moral oneness out of which came unity of purpose; so that even the almightiness of the Father might be invoked confidently by the Son for the protection of his sheep. But more than any mere phrasing of his acquaintance with God, the entire atmosphere of the life of Jesus, the perfect confidence with which he moves as a child in the Father’s house and completely at home, the clearness of vision of spiritual truths and the certainty of knowledge with which he speaks (things “seen and known”), reveal how absolutely this is true, that he knew God. The word “acquaintance,” bold as it sounds in such a connection at first, is after all the true word; for Jesus knew God as one friend knows another. He was the “friend of God” in the same sense in which Abraham was, who pleaded for Sodom as friend pleads with friend, but in a far higher degree. When Jesus says to the paralytic, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” it is because he is confident of his knowledge of God’s conditions of forgiveness, which this man has fulfilled. He knows the very root of the system of duties. He teaches “with authority,” because he speaks out of the fulness of perfect knowledge of the will of God.

Now, acquaintance with God can come only from the impartation of himself by God to the soul. Jesus spake what he had “heard from God.” He, least of all men, could profess to know God because of any special insight, or as if such knowledge could be self-discovered. The man who knows God must know him upon the side of the revelation of His loving-kindness and tender mercy, of His consolations and providences. God reveals Himself thus only to those who are at heart one with Him. His grace is always operative to draw men to Him, as the heat of the sun is always poured out upon the earth; but He can intimately communicate Himself only to those who accept this grace, as the sun will warm only those who move into its rays. Hence there is a close relation

between the sinlessness of Jesus and his knowledge of God. The latter could not be true were not the former entire. Every degree of imperfection in the former would involve some degree of error or defect in the latter. And it is the combination of both which leads to the next particular in our enumeration.

5. The perfection of Jesus as the *ideal teacher* in things pertaining to God. He received, through his perfect consecration to the will of God, all that he, as a human soul, was capable of receiving; and thus he imparts to us what still remains the loftiest religious instruction of which the world has any knowledge.

We need not maintain, of course, that his teaching in every respect is incapable of improvement or even correction. There will doubtless come a time when aspects of his teachings of which he had no conception will appear. It is possible that we are now living in a time when, in the new interest and knowledge of social conditions and responsibilities which have arisen, fundamental modifications of some of the ethical teachings of Jesus will be called for. But we shall perform this modification at some points by the light which is afforded at other points by the great underlying principle of love, which he illuminated to man as no one had before and no one has equally since. But such suggestions aside—which are mainly possibilities, important only to a correct understanding of our positive position as to his teaching—it becomes astonishingly evident, when we compare Jesus with other great founders of religions, how much greater he is. The gulf is so deep between him and them that they do not seem to know God at all! Confucius tells so little about God that he can scarcely be called a religious teacher. The *nirvana* of Buddhism is not heaven. But Jesus brings out the being and nature of God with perfect distinctness. While he says little about the omnipotence of God, he lays great emphasis upon his infinite love, which is the foundation of the moral universe. When the idea of the divine providence, which is but the corollary of infinite love, by which he cares for every individual son of man; and of prayer, as the means of communion between the earthly child and the Heavenly Father; and the conception of duty and of responsibility upon our part, are added, you have all the features which still appear to us the

highest and best in the religious thinking of the world—and they are all the teachings of Jesus. Upon them has been founded our Western civilization, and by them it is distinguished from the civilizations of India and China, yes, and from that of Turkey.

In this way Christ becomes an authority for us. The rationalist who starts out by denying any absolute authority except that of perceived truth, ends by acknowledging the authority of Jesus *as an expert*. This does not involve the acknowledgment of any infallibility on the part of Jesus. Paul also is an expert and an authority, even though some of his undoubted teachings, as for example in respect to marriage and divorce, be rejected in the clearer light of the present time as defective. Paul himself abstracted from the real Jesus in favor of the ideal Christ; and we may do the same. But it remains that we may listen to Jesus with peculiar respect, and that we actually do so. He is the one who has made it perfectly clear that he who does not love his brother does not love God.

6. We may also view him as our *perfect example*. Not, of course, as to the details of his life, but as to its spirit. His acceptance of the nearest duty, his persistence in performing it, his loyalty to his mission, his indifference to personal considerations, his preference of his work to life—these are the great features of his life, and here he is the unsurpassed example. To view duty as he viewed it and to maintain one's love to God and men with the same entire subordination of merely selfish interests is still the highest ideal which we have of moral perfection and our unattained standard.

7. And we may also say, finally, that our relations with Christ culminate in his ideal presence with us. Paul, in consequence of his personal theology, viewed the fellowship of the Christian with his Master as a personal and real spiritual presence of Christ with him. This was, of course, dependent upon his conception of his divine attributes and his active government of the world in the interest of the ultimate kingdom of God. But the Fourth Gospel presents the matter in a form more acceptable to modern thought when it speaks of the presence of Christ as ideal. "It is expedient that I go away. . . . The Comforter will come to you." The present Christ is, literally, the personal presence of God with the

soul. The teachings of Christ still remain the material of instruction which the soul uses and God uses with the soul; and hence it is that the Comforter "receives" of Christ's words and "shows" them unto the believer. Thus Christ has his *real* present place in the experience of the Christian.

It is, no doubt, here that the most difficult point in the transition from traditional to rational views is to be found. Orthodox piety often seems to culminate in the worship of Christ. But what is it that we have been worshiping in Christ? Is it not the divine in him, the "Word," the Second Person of the Trinity, or "God in Christ"? And what have we worshiped in God, under this form, but his attributes of mercy, personal love, forgiveness, grace—in a word, his benevolence?

Now, we may say that it has been natural and possibly necessary to view these divine attributes as displayed in Christ rather than as inherent in the Infinite Spirit Himself. Mankind has come out of an animal ancestry into humanity, out of savagery into civilization, out of slavery into freedom, out of despotism into civil liberty, out of the era of deficit into that of surplus. Now, out of each of these states it has brought a heritage of fear. Man feared the wild beasts, then savage men, then the great masters of men's fortunes and their lives, then kings, and always hunger. The world seemed hard and unjust, and the Power that lay behind it unmindful of human suffering. They feared him with dread and apprehension. The earliest history is full of it. Men must not "touch the mount," lest the inscrutable deity should flame forth in some unanticipated form of wrath. The earth might open and swallow offenders. And even when a chosen people felt themselves secure, they were still afraid that they might forfeit divine favor by their sins, and sins were often utterly non-moral transgressions. Fear, inherited, instinctive, vague, but real, inescapable, dominated the conception of God as of the world, and made it long impossible to believe in God's entire goodness. To be sure, the most exalted spirits of Judaism had escaped from this nightmare, and believed in the loving-kindness and tender mercy, the truth, the righteousness, and the vindicative justice of God. But they had their mediators and system of mediation between God

and man; and the early Christians, like Paul who was under the influence of paganism from his youth, felt the need of a Mediator, and ascribed the loving side of the Deity to another than the Father, to the incarnate and suffering Deity, that is, to Christ. But the world has now come out into a new epoch. Even that of deficit has at last passed away. There is no need that any man should suffer from wild beasts and wild men, or even from hunger, except as men have failed to avail themselves of the stores of help that actually exist. And thus we have come to the point where we can recognize the entire and unqualified goodness of God, and can now ascribe directly to the Father all those merciful and gracious traits which have attracted us so powerfully to Christ. The idea of God thus emerges for the modern thinker from the darkness of the ages of dread and becomes what Jesus himself taught, that of a Father, possessed of all the tenderness of the best earthly father, and infinitely more. And thus the worship of Christ merges in the worship of the Father, and his presence with us is now understood as the true presence of the Father, communing directly, as an Infinite Spirit can, with our spirits, and thus establishing a personal contact between the infinite and the finite person.

Thus the rational Christology becomes a *Christology of values*. The rational faculty operates first critically to destroy the literal interpretation of the old church Christology by exhibiting its lack of proof, and ultimately its unreasonableness. It operates further to protect the thinker in the positive construction of his own Christology from affirming that which is irrational. If he accepts in any sense the sinlessness of Christ, he is not to do this in a sense which will involve irrationality. There is no such element in the simple position that a man should have a perfect union of will with God, choosing the divine will as the law of all his actions, nor in this, that he should maintain such a union. Further than this the rational argument does not go, except we consider the congruousness of the idea of sinlessness with all we know of Jesus, which, however, would hardly give us what might be called proof of the position. As a foundation for argument for any other position, we must finally say that Jesus' sinlessness lacks proof. But there is more to be said than this upon the positions which have

been advanced in these pages upon the rationalistic Christology. They are found to have value for the development of the Christian life. They have been borne upon the current of Christian thought from the beginning. They have a meaning, which is evident from the position which they have held among the leading ideas of the church. They have been found to awaken spiritual energies and to promote peace of mind and practical piety. The progress of the church along the course of the ages may be said to be principally due to its ideas of Christ, not, of course, to the false or defective elements which are found in them, but to the truth which they convey. In the earlier times these true elements may have been inseparable from the forms in which they were presented and unworkable without them. In the knowledge of the new time by which the false and the defective are stripped off, what remains? The ideal of human sinlessness, as a standard and a goal, is of too great value to relinquish. It is best conceived under the form of a sinless person: many can conceive it in no other way. We may thus choose, for the purposes of edification, to view it thus, and we may say that Jesus was this sinless person. We do not affirm positively, as a matter incontrovertible, that he was; but, inasmuch as we find the idea valuable for help and the personification of it equally helpful, we accept it. It would not be helpful as a mere arbitrary supposition, for which there was nothing to be said but this, that we liked it and found it useful. It has for it a considerable variety of reasons. Its very helpfulness is an argument for its truth. But our final reason for accepting it, since the arguments in its favor cannot be said to raise it above all doubt, is its value.

And so with all the other elements of Christology mentioned above. The rational Christology becomes a Christology of values, and will prove more effective than the old, we may hope, in helping humanity on to a more intimate fellowship with God, a loftier morality, and a more abundant service to man.